

Towards Sinophone Game Studies

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Abstract

The editor's introduction discusses progress so far and possible future directions in the emerging field of Sinophone game studies, taken to mean the study of games – in this case, specifically video, computer, digital, or electronic games – in a Sinophone context, including mainland China and the broader Chinese-speaking world. Recent industry figures and news stories related to video gaming in the People's Republic of China (PRC) paint a picture of continued expansion and growing global ambitions, albeit tempered by the regular introduction of fresh government regulations surrounding game content, gaming permissions for under-18s, game streaming, and game license approval. The eleven contributions to this issue, however, reflect the diversity of possible approaches to the study of Sinophone gaming, focusing not just on the often-conflicting politics and economics of the PRC games industry, but also exploring Taiwan's flourishing indie game scene, political uses of games in Hong Kong, game-based representations of online and offline realities, issues in the transnational adaptation and localisation of games, and more besides. Sinophone game studies is a highly fruitful area of academic research that is intrinsically inter- and cross-disciplinary in nature and well placed to respond to some of the most pressing issues of our time, whether they be international conflict, ecological crisis, identity politics, minority rights, or even the development of disparate virtual worlds into a cross-platform 'metaverse' in which many of us may one day live our lives.

Keywords: Gaming in China, digital games, computer games, video games, online games, Taiwanese games, gaming in Hong Kong, Sinophone studies, Sinophone game studies, ludology, PRC games industry

We are excited to present this special issue on Games and Gaming in China and the Sinophone World, featuring seven original research articles alongside four short essays, all submitted in response to our Call for Papers of March 2021. The field of game studies has been interested in China and Sinophone gaming for some time: the Chinese chapter of the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA), for instance, has held regular conferences since 2014,¹ and the first English-language special issue on gaming in a Chinese context was published in *Games and Culture* in 2016, edited by Bjarke Liboriussen and Paul Martin.² English-language scholarship on Sinophone gaming culture has mostly taken the form of journal articles or chapters in edited books, with two academic monographs appearing so far (Fung, 2018; Szablewicz, 2020). Game studies or ludology (*youxi yanjiu* 游戏研究) has been expanding in the Chinese-speaking world, too, with a notable increase in the number of journal articles and academic books published over the last five years or so. We believe that this, however, is the first time a Chinese studies journal has dedicated a whole issue to the topic of video games. As

¹ The Chinese DiGRA website can be found here: <http://www.chinesedigra.org/>.

² This special issue of *Games and Culture* can be accessed here: <https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/gac/11/3>.

such, we aim to contribute to a young and highly dynamic field of research, the full contours of which are only slowly coming into view.

What exactly is game studies and how might it be beneficial for Chinese studies and game studies to be in closer communication with each other? To define game studies as the study of games is about as helpful as describing Chinese studies as the study of China, as ‘games’ and ‘China’ can mean many different things to many different people. While game studies and Chinese studies are usually situated as sub-disciplines of larger fields (media and cultural studies and area studies, respectively), both are intrinsically inter- or cross-disciplinary in nature. To research games could mean analysing player behaviours within or outside a game-world; delineating game genres and the connections between forms of gaming and other media past and present; carrying out a close reading or ‘close playing’ (Chang, 2008) of an individual title and examining its themes or gameplay mechanics; conducting a sociological enquiry of the people who play certain kinds of games; studying the macro- and micro-economics of gaming and its involvement in the broader cultural economy and creative industries; making sense of gaming spaces and environments within games and in the physical world where games are played; probing the links between game design, gaming practices, and gender identities; tracing modes and patterns of adaptation, translation, and localisation as games and gamers cross regional and linguistic boundaries; and much, much more besides.

As regular readers of this journal are keenly aware, to study China is similarly to embark on a series of cross-disciplinary enquiries that may start in one field – art and literature, for example – but invariably come into contact with countless others, from politics and economics to anthropology, sociology, geography, and historiography. It is fitting, then, that the essays featured in this issue represent a range of disciplines, even as they fall within the arts, humanities, and social sciences with which our journal is most concerned. More than anything, our authors make clear the significance of gaming to the present-day Sinophone world, with special attention paid to mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Rather than leaning on the headline figures and stories that dominate news reports on gaming in the region, they demonstrate the variety of uses to which games are put and the myriad ways in which games – in this case what are variously known as computer, digital, electronic, or video games – interact with contemporary life, from cult religious practices and protest politics to the construction of a Chinese metaverse.

But before I say more about the contributions themselves, a quick visit to some recent headline stories about gaming in China may still come in handy. Video gaming, as we stated in our initial Call for Papers, is big business in China: in 2021, the value of the PRC’s mobile and PC game markets alone stood at \$45.49 billion US dollars, up 5.5% on the previous year, with a PC and mobile gaming population in the mainland of 706 million players (Businesswire, 2022). China’s overall video gaming population of 740 million players is bigger than the populations of the US, Japan, Germany, France, and the UK combined (Holmes, 2021). China is also home to the world’s most developed e-sports (*dianzi jingji* 电子竞技) market, with an audience of 434 million fans. The world’s three highest-earning mobile games – *Honour of Kings* (*Wangzhe rongyao* 王者荣耀; 2015), *Player-Unknown’s Battlegrounds Mobile* (*Juedi qiusheng M* 绝地求生 M; 2018), and *Genshin Impact* (*Yuanshen* 原神; 2020) – are produced by two Chinese companies, Tencent Holdings 腾讯 and miHoYo 米哈游, reflecting the growing successes of China’s gaming industry. *Genshin Impact*, an open-world fantasy role-playing game released internationally in 2020, made \$986.2 million US dollars in the first half of 2021 alone (Cao, 2022) and has an average daily player base of 9 million gamers (Che, 2022).

Genshin Impact is a good example of how substantial investment in China's gaming sector can pay off, aided by a cross-platform release strategy that made the game simultaneously available as a mobile and PC game as well as for consoles (*dianzi youxiji* 电子游戏机 or *zhuji youxi* 主机游戏) including Sony's PlayStation 4 (PS4) and, the following year, PS5 – China's infamous 'console gaming ban' having been officially lifted in 2015. The global ambitions of mainland China's video game industry are also evident in several recent buying sprees that Chinese game companies have embarked on. Tencent Holdings, for example, purchased over one hundred game companies in 2021 alone, of which a third were based outside of China (Che, 2022). Tencent also licenses hit titles such as the American-produced *Call of Duty* (*Shiming zhaohuan* 使命召唤; 2003) and South Korea's *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* and has formed partnerships with major international gaming corporations including Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, and Nintendo, the latter of whose popular Switch console is only officially available in mainland China in a locked-down Tencent-licensed version.

The success story of mainland China's game industry has, however, been tempered in the last year or so by several developments. The first and most widely reported of these is the latest iteration of China's 'online gaming crackdown', referring to the introduction in late August 2021 of stringent new restrictions which limit the amount of time minors can spend playing online games (*wangluo youxi* 网络游戏) to one hour between 8 and 9pm on Fridays and weekends, a tightening of what were already very strict rules about the amount of time under-18s in China could spend in collective game-worlds.³ While these regulations have been welcomed by many parents and teachers, they are far from watertight: young gamers can circumvent them by, for example, accessing overseas gaming servers or 'accelerators' (*jiasuqi* 加速器) that are not affected by the new restrictions (Liang, 2021). Another development was a pause in the approval of new game licenses (ISBNs or *youxi banhao* 游戏版号) in China between July 2021 and April 2022. This negatively impacted domestic video gaming revenue, already affected by the latest regulations announced by the National Press and Publication Administration (NPPA; *Guojia xinwen chubanshu* 国家新闻出版署), and contributed to a noticeable reduction of the market growth rate in 2021.

Developments such as these play into an image of gaming in China as being shaped overwhelmingly by state-led, ideologically motivated monitoring and regulation, a consequence of the government's long-held view of computer games as being conducive to addictive and morally suspect behaviours. Such a perception seemed to be borne out again in August 2021 when *Economic Information Daily*, a sub-outlet of the state-run Xinhua News Agency, published an article that referred to online gaming as 'spiritual opium' (*jingshen yapian* 精神鸦片) in the title, a long-standing accusation reflecting the moral panic surrounding digital gaming in China (Szablewicz, 2020: 66-75). This immediately wiped \$60 billion US dollars off the stock value of Tencent Holdings, before the article in question was swiftly edited to remove all references to gaming as a drug, presumably to minimise further financial damage (Juanshang Zhongguo, 2021). Clearly, economics, politics, and morality are closely intertwined – and often in conflict – when it comes to both the regulation and commonly held impressions of gaming in the PRC.

Judging by the submissions we received for this issue of *BJoCS*, however, these regulatory drives and their economic and social ramifications are far from being the most interesting thing about games and gaming cultures in China and the broader Sinophone world. Indeed, one of the most popular topics in submissions to this special issue is not specific to the

³ The announcement can be found here: http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2021-09/01/content_5634661.htm.

PRC at all but reflects the successes of the neighbouring game industry in Taiwan. Taiwan's gaming industry is, as you would expect, far smaller than that of the PRC, with a population of around 15 million players and a market output of \$2.454 billion US dollars in 2021 (Yen, 2022). Yet Taiwan is also home to a particularly vibrant indie games scene, which has already put out a number of games that have achieved considerable domestic success and made a splash around the world (Bailes, 2022).

Two games produced by the Taiwanese developer Red Candle Games (*Chizhu youxi* 赤燭遊戲), *Detention* (*Fanxiao* 返校; 2017) and *Devotion* (*Huanyuan* 還原; 2019), are the focus of four contributions to this issue, having been widely celebrated by gamers and critics for their reflections on Taiwanese history and innovations in genre. Taiwanese indie games that have yet to receive as much academic attention include *The Legend of Tianding* (*Liao Tianding: xidai xiongzei zhi zui qi* 廖添丁：稀代凶賊の最期; 2021), a side-scrolling role-playing action game set during the Japanese occupation of Taiwan that was developed by CGCG (Creative Games and Computer Graphics Corporation) and released by Neon Doctrine, as well as the OPUS trilogy of futuristic sci-fi games produced by game studio SIGONO, consisting of *OPUS: The Day We Found Earth* (*OPUS: diqiu jihua* OPUS 地球計畫; 2016), *OPUS: Rocket of Whispers* (*OPUS: linghun zhi qiao* OPUS: 靈魂之橋; 2017), and *OPUS: Echo of Starsong* (*OPUS: longmai changge* OPUS: 龍脈長歌; 2021). Taiwanese indie games are notable not only for their artwork, often featuring a combination of Taiwanese, Japanese, or Hong Kong manga-style aesthetics, but also for their music. The OPUS soundtrack, composed by the Taiwanese musician Triodust, has been so popular that it was released as an album on music streaming platforms including Spotify, Bandcamp, and Apple Music.

There is a sense in which indie games, no matter where they are produced, represent the avant-garde of video game culture, a space in which more creative risks can be taken and less money is at stake. Yet researchers would do well not to limit their more difficult questions to the kinds of games that seem to have been made with more difficult questions in mind. There is a temptation to consider mass market games through a mass culture lens, focusing on a rather predictable and well-rehearsed struggle between top-down forms of ideological hegemony and bottom-up strategies of player resistance. This is especially so when mainstream games produced in the PRC often carry or encourage overtly nationalistic in-game narratives and modes of gameplay, or when players find ways to express political views even within the confines of 'escapist' and fun-focused games. One notorious example of the latter occurred during the first Coronavirus lockdown of Spring 2020, when Hong Kong players of Nintendo's *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (*Jihe la! Dongwu senyohui* 集合啦! 动物森友会; 2020) personalised the game's cartoon environment to show support for the 2019 protest movement, displaying banners with slogans such as 'Free Hong Kong: Revolution Now' (BBC, 2020). It was little surprise, then, when *Animal Crossing* was removed from the Chinese market, where it had been on sale unofficially despite not having been formally approved by China's gaming regulators.

But big budget, mass market games – often referred to as AAA or Triple A games (3A *dazuo* 3A 大作) – lend themselves just as well to more nuanced questions of aesthetics, philosophy, sociology, historiography, and so on as do the more thought-provoking indie games like those described in several contributions to this issue. How do certain games contribute to shifts in the norms and forms of game-based art, agency, or genre? What kinds of virtual mobility do video games afford or constrict? How do identity or taste groups develop within and around games, and what are the community-building functions of game-adjacent spaces and practices such as live streaming, online reviews, cosplay conventions, and digital

game distribution sites, such as China's region-specific version of Steam, Zhengqi pingtai 蒸汽平台, launched in early 2021? How does players' subjective identification with their in-game avatars vary across titles, genres, and gaming contexts, and what accounts for differences in gamer-avatar identification? How do games participate in the construction of local, national, and global histories as well as the shaping of cultural memory, and what forms of historical representation can be observed in games across the AAA/indie spectrum? These kinds of questions have already been discussed in game studies scholarship for years, but are only just starting to be broached in relation to games produced and played in the Chinese-speaking world.

So, I see a bright future for Sinophone game studies and expect that the authors featured in this special issue, many of whom are currently early career academics, will have their own role to play in the progress of this field. Some developments in Sinophone gaming – the introduction of even more restrictions in the PRC, for example, or the efforts of Chinese game developers to construct a cross-platform 'metaverse' to rival those of overseas media giants – can be anticipated, even if their precise ramifications will not be clear for years to come. Some are less a question of crystal ball-gazing than of observing trends underway in related areas of culture, such as shifts in popular attitudes towards gender identity and sexuality evident in the content and reception of Chinese internet fiction (*wangluo xiaoshuo* 网络小说). And yet other developments are entirely unpredictable, dependent on news events and the responses of players and regulators around the world to games that have not yet been released and technologies that have yet to be developed or refined. One question weighing on my mind as I write in the midst of an unprecedented heatwave here in the UK is to what extent video games and their virtual realities can offer respite – or unhelpful distraction – from the hazards of climate change and rapidly degrading environments in the Anthropocene, and to what extent video gaming technologies and the resources they consume are contributing to the problem. Is it possible, as Alenda Y. Chang suggests (Chang, 2019), that games may offer something more hopeful when it comes to confronting the ecological crisis before us, not standing in opposition to nature, but instead enabling forms of agency, reflection, and intervention that may lead to positive collective action to help heal our planet?

The diversity of this special issue is embodied in the backgrounds of our contributors as well as the topics they cover, with authors based in the UK, US, Australia, Malta, New Zealand, and Hong Kong. Many do not hail from Chinese or East Asian studies backgrounds, but are instead located in game studies, modern languages, comparative literature, and anthropology departments; some also have experience as game designers. For many in Chinese studies, myself included, gaming is currently more a side interest than a main area of research, due in part to the nature of the training we have received and in part, I suspect, to a concern that researching something as apparently 'frivolous' as video games may not be looked kindly upon by those responsible for assessing the quality and impact of research plans and outputs. For academics of any age who have never played or even read much about video games before, gaming may be a complete enigma, and a rather off-putting one at that. One of the challenges for future researchers of Sinophone video games, therefore, will be making its academic and real-world significance loud and clear while engaging closely with colleagues in more established areas of Chinese studies. In doing so, it will be essential to draw on the technical and material expertise of game studies as well as the linguistic, cultural, and historical sensitivity of area studies, including research already underway in the Chinese-speaking world.

I have grouped the contributions into four loose categories: history and horror; activism and ideology; adaptation and localisation; and reality and virtual reality. The first of these is the largest, containing two research articles and two short essays all focusing on one or both above-mentioned Taiwanese indie games *Detention* and *Devotion*. We open with a rich

anthropological study from **Joseph J. L. Beadle** of the ways in which the experience of playing *Devotion* spills out into the ‘real’ world of Taiwanese temples and other religious spaces. This leads to what Beadle calls “religious gamification”, “a sociocultural and economic process whereby religion is re-imagined, designed, and marketed as a game to be played both within and beyond designated game spaces, and with numerous agendas and effects”. Beadle’s article makes several important contributions to the study of religion and games, perhaps the most thought-provoking of which is the idea that religion can, itself, be a “gaming experience”, affecting the ways that people “(re)-make” and “do” religion, to varying effects. Like other essays in this issue, Beadle highlights the porosity of the boundaries between the gaming world and the physical world beyond, as players seek to experience *guanluoyin* 觀落陰 rituals outside the game and observe every similarities between elements of the game and their own lived environments. Games, it is clear from Beadle’s research, extend far beyond the fictional or semi-fictional world in which they are set and the technologies that enable the temporary adoption of certain forms of in-game agency.

The second article to consider *Devotion* and *Detention*, from **Chia-rong Wu**, explores the broader cultural impact of the two games in a Taiwanese context and focuses on the theme of horror and the historical setting of Taiwan during its Martial Law era. The horrific effects of these games, Wu finds, lie in the collective trauma of Taiwanese history and in the highly immersive mode of gameplay. By solving puzzles and interacting with in-game characters (NPCs or Non-Player Characters), players become what Adam Chapman has called ‘player-historians’, engaging in historical practices in a “structured story space” (Chapman, 2016: 232). Wu also finds, similarly to Beadle, that the effects of *Devotion* and *Detention* are not limited to the gaming world, expanding instead to a wider appreciation of Taiwanese history and politics that has ramifications far beyond the boundaries of the games. We can thus see how gaming, as Wu puts it, “extends the political domain of popular culture and contributes to the everyday conversation in the actual world”.

Following these articles, we have two short essays that also focus on the same two games. **Jamie Wing Tung Tse** considers how *Detention* and *Devotion* offer a “modernized, restorative gaze” upon elements of Taiwan’s past that have often been forgotten by or caused distress for the Taiwanese people. Her essay points the way to future research while offering a hopeful glimpse of some of the ways that gaming can provide a healing experience for players, even if they have not directly experienced the historical events in question. What is important, according to Tse, is the sense of authenticity with which these events and settings are portrayed within the game. And finally, in a co-authored essay on cultural encounters in *Devotion*, **Gregory Scott** and **Katherine Alexander** present a run-down of the religious imagery, literary themes, and horrific experiences offered by the game while also pondering the potential pedagogical uses of playing – and streaming – a game of this sort for students of Chinese or Taiwanese studies. Might playing and watching games in class be a fruitful way of bridging cultural and historical gaps between students and their academic subjects – and even help bring the Sinophone world closer to the UK, especially at times when on-site research or studying abroad may not be possible for a variety of reasons?

Our second loose grouping of papers on activism and ideology opens with an article by **Hugh Davies** that presents a comprehensive literature review of existing scholarship on digital gaming activism and “playful resistance” in a Sinophone context as well as elsewhere across the world, connecting this substantial body of research to more recent cases of gaming activism in response to Hong Kong’s 2019 anti-extradition bill protest movement. Davies traces a rich lineage of video game activism and gamified politics that have taken place largely within the worlds of MMOGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Games), exploring some of the range of

“playful tactics” with which gamers can assert their agency in relation to the dominant ideologies of the time. Importantly, Chinese gamers can be targets as well as instigators of in-game activism, as when subjected to anti-Chinese rhetoric and antagonism due to the common assumption among gamers outside of the PRC that, in popular MMOGs like *World of Warcraft*, “all gold farmers were Chinese players, and by extension, that all Chinese players were gold farmers”. It is precisely the popularity and cultural gravity of video games, Davies argues, that lead to their employment in such a wide variety of contexts, both everyday and global, including the large-scale political protests of the kind that erupted in Hong Kong in 2019.

Like Davies, **Christopher J. H. Ho** focuses in his short essay on some of the uses of video games during the 2019 Hong Kong protest movement, illustrating the variety of ways that players employed games and gaming discourse to organise violent acts of political dissent. Ho’s essay is structured around the categories of ‘play’, i.e. the use of games to educate and inform protestors, and ‘metas’, i.e. the systematic methods by which players “discuss, improve, rate, and share gaming strategies”. Although he suggests that the benefits of his research might lie in the possibility of predicting the form and likelihood of future game-based protest, Ho’s and Davies’ pieces also serve to document and preserve the diversity of game-based activism or playful resistance that has already occurred, even if its outcomes were not what the Hong Kong protestors were hoping for.

The third piece to examine the nexus of activism and ideology is a research article by **Johnathan Harrington** and **Zimu Zhang**, who further develop Harrington’s concept of “play methods” to explore the ways mainland Chinese gamers “perform” patriotism in digital games. Play methods are ways of playing that diverge from designer intentions and are created through community interactions, serving as a way for players “to learn, reflect, and even challenge latent meaning within games”. For young gamers, this can be a way of rejecting the original political intentions of certain games, as well as a means of negotiating forms of patriotism in differing and occasionally hostile environments. Harrington and Zhang’s research serves as a useful counterpoint to the previous two pieces on Hong Kong-based gaming activism, showing how young players within the PRC use alternative play methods to express what are ultimately mainstream, or at least pro-establishment, political views.

Moving on to the third theme of adaptation and localisation, we have two articles that focus on the consequences of games and game-related activities crossing national and linguistic borders. First, **Hailey Austin** and **Robin Sloan** examine the phenomenon of *shanzhai* 山寨 or ‘copycat’ games in mainland China, considering Chinese games that bear an uncanny resemblance to games produced elsewhere in light of transmedial game copies in non-Chinese game industries. Austin and Sloan give several examples of creativity within Western gaming contexts that bear similarity with *shanzhai* games produced in China, such as remakes, remasters, and neo-retro or nostalgia games. By bringing Intellectual Property (IP), transmedial production, and gaming fandom into conversation, Austin and Sloan further complicate the still widely held impression that *shanzhai* culture is mostly a case of copying or copyright infringement. Instead, Chinese-produced versions of Western games highlight processes of localisation, culturalization, and even subversion, as game producers adopt gaming templates to meet the needs of local audiences.

In her research article, **Dody M. H. Chen** also pursues the theme of localisation, offering an in-depth study of the hitherto unexplored phenomenon of game streaming localisation. Game streaming is a hugely popular activity in China as elsewhere in the world, with audiences tuning in in their millions to watch and interact with gamers as they play games, live or pre-recorded, over the internet. Chen focuses on the Mandarin Chinese streaming of *Overwatch* league (OWL), an e-sports tournament centred on Blizzard’s popular MMOG

Overwatch (*Shouwang xianfeng* 守望先锋; 2016), providing a detailed overview of four areas of localisation: ads, gaming slang, pop-up statistics or ‘notes’, and game-streaming programmes. Her research does not just reveal the diversity of disciplines that come into play when studying game cultures (in her case, “linguistics, lexicology, translation studies, communication studies, and advertising”), but also serves as a reminder of the ways in which gaming, even as it depends on written and spoken language for in-game and social interaction, is a language in itself, encountering occasional obstacles as it brings people together across the boundaries of nations and cultures.

Our final mini grouping of contributions on the themes of reality and virtual reality consists of a short essay on realist games from mainland China and a research article on *Genshin Impact* and its surrounding activities. First, **Haoxi Luo** considers the three Chinese indie games *Chinese Parents* (*Zhongguoshi jiazhang* 中国式家长; 2018), *Bad Kids* (*Huai xiaohai* 坏小孩; 2021), and *Life Restart* (*Rensheng chongkai moniqi* 人生重开模拟器; 2021) as examples of realistic or reality-inspired games, suggesting that they create a Foucauldian heterotopia in which sociological and historical issues can be explored in a virtual world that is similar but not identical to the reality beyond the game. Games like these revel in telling “nontypical stories of China” yet find themselves bumping up against a regulatory environment that has little patience for stories that do not hew closely enough to the government’s own vision of ‘reality’.

And last but not least, **Matthew James Adams** wraps up the issue with a theoretical, if not a little speculative research article on the cybernetic implications of *Genshin Impact* as it is played by gamers based in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Drawing on extensive in-person and virtual participant-observation, Adams argues that the in-game monetisation system known as ‘gacha’ helps players form a sense of personhood and “cyber sociality” at the same time as players become a component in the gacha characters or avatars as they exist within the game and surrounding contexts (social media, for example, or ‘v-tubing’/live streaming). This results in a wholeness or coherence across people and systems that he terms “cybernesis”, consisting of horizontal, i.e. multiple people across one network, and vertical, i.e. multiple networks within one person, variations.

The other aspect of Adams’ discussion concerns *Genshin Impact* parent company miHoYo’s slogan “tech otakus save the world”. What is this ‘world’ and who will determine how it works and what – and who – it revolves around? One answer might lie in the concept of the metaverse, which miHoYo themselves have slated as a part of their commercial ambitions. If miHoYo are successful in their goal of “creating immersive virtual world experiences for players around the world”, or what they are calling the HoYoverse, then the outcome might be multiple metaverses competing for attention from gamers and internet users across the globe, with this one inevitably subject to the ideological interests of regulators in the PRC. Adams’ article does not delve into the darker implications of metaverse technology, nor does he consider the experiences of those subject to PRC governance who do not have the same freedom of access to online spaces, gaming-specific or otherwise, like the Uyghur population in Xinjiang. Still, his article raises interesting questions about the ways in which video games and associated forms of cyber sociality will shape human subjectivity in years to come, for better or for worse.

This is far from being an exhaustive overview of video games in China and the Sinophone world today; instead, our special issue offers a series of snapshots of gaming and gaming-related practices in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, as well as trends in the localisation and transnational adaptation of games. There are many important topics that do not appear in this special issue, not least the experiences of marginalised and minority communities

within the PRC and broader Sinophone region, and – of course! – many questions remain unasked and unanswered. One major area of research that is not covered in the present issue is the development of video games as part of a larger history of gaming and cultures of play in China and the Sinophone world. While it is true that games can produce new or adjusted forms of historical consciousness, as can be seen in the case of the Taiwanese indie games *Detention* and *Devotion*, they are also subject to historical consciousness in themselves. Contemporary digital gaming practices and discourses, moreover, are the result of developments that have occurred over many years, through the participation of many different people, in differing contexts and with differing aims. These processes, along with other topics alluded to in my series of questions above, await future exploration.

Finally, I would like to say a huge thank you to all the peer reviewers who contributed to this issue, many of whom can be considered pioneers in the nascent field of Sinophone game studies and who dedicated considerable time to reviewing the seven research articles we are publishing here. I am also grateful for the help and support of my co-editor, Gerda Wielander, and outgoing co-editor Gregory Scott, who has served the journal for the past two years, and for the herculean efforts of our meticulous copyeditor, Hannah Theaker, in preparing these articles and short essays for publication. My gratitude also goes to the fourteen authors whose hard work has created this issue, as well as the other scholars whose submissions were not ultimately selected for inclusion. I trust and hope that Sinophone game studies will attract growing academic attention over the coming years and decades, and that this special issue will stand as just one landmark in the development of an exciting field that is full of challenges and rich in possibilities.

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